

EXERCISE BICYCLE VIRTUAL REALITY STEERING APPARATUS

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to exercise or stationary bicycles in general. More
10 specifically to a steering mechanism for use in a virtual reality system simulating
handlebar movement with spring loaded return to center capability.

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

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This application claims priority of Provisional Patent Application Serial
No.60/409,300 filed 09/10/2002.

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BACKGROUND ART

Previously, many types of exercise bicycles have been used in endeavoring to
provide entertainment while exercising using video games or television set top consoles
25 as an incentive.

The prior art listed below did not disclose patents that possess any of the novelty
of the instant invention; however the following U.S. patents are considered related:

	<u>Patent Number</u>	<u>Inventor</u>	<u>Issue Date</u>
	4,512,567	Phillips	Apr.23, 1985
30	4,542,897	Melton et al.	Sep. 24, 1985
	4,637,605	Richie	Jan. 20, 1987
	4,976,435	Shatford et al.	Dec. 11, 1990

5,591,104	Andrus et al.	Jan. 7, 1997
5,645,513	Haydocy et al.	Jul. 8, 1997
5,839,990	Virkkala	Nov. 24, 1998

Phillips in U.S. patent 4,512,567 teaches an exercise bicycle along with a potentiometer which provides signals in proportion to the handlebar directional motion and speed of the bicycle. These signals interface with a microcomputer to operate a video game. The handlebars control side to side movement, up and down also forward and backward movement.

Patent No. 4,542,897 issued to Melton et al. is for an exercycle combined with a video game. The handlebars control side to side movement and the grips up and down movement.

Richie in U.S. patent 4,637,605 discloses a video game control moving the handlebars. The arrangement can only be operated with a preset minimum exercise level.

Shatford et al. in U.S. patent 4,976,435 teaches an adapter for an exercise bicycle. The handlebars control side to side movement, up and down also the crank on the bicycle controls the speed on the video game.

Haydocy et al. in U.S. patent 5,645,513 discloses a physical exercise machine that interfaces with a video system. Movement of the pedals is indicated as speed on the video and other inputs such as pulse, heart rate etc. are indicated and recorded. The load resistance imposed by the video system.

U.S. patent 5,839,990 of Virkkala is for an exerciser combined with a video game computer allowing participation in the game dependent upon his rate of exercise and hand to eye coordination.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

There have been developed many types of exercising devices that replicate the leg and body movement of riding a bicycle and are generically grouped into so called stationary or exercise bicycles. It is well established that users of exercise bicycles and other fitness devices, such as elliptical trainers and stepping machines, watch television or listen to music so as not to become bored during their workout. With the introduction, some years ago, of home computers and the internet, home and gym fitness enthusiasts began seeking solutions for electronic motivational workouts. A number of exercise bicycle manufacturers have enabled their equipment to port data signals to computers for the purpose of motivational interactive graphics and training logs. None, however, provide steering options which would allow an almost total simulation of the virtual cycling experience with video game control.

It is therefore a primary object of the invention to provide realistic true resistance when steering in a 3D virtual reality environment which encourages exercising in the indoor stationary cycling discipline. In order to accomplish this object, a discrete device is used that interfaces with the stationary bicycle that includes spring loading which permits the handlebar to dampen the movement of motion while increasing the felt resistance. The resistance is sensed when the further the handlebar is turned the more difficult it is to rotate. Also the invention provides self centering of the handlebar since when the handlebar is unrestrained it automatically returns to the center, duplicating the feel and impression of riding a bicycle. This simulation duplicates the condition that when a rider removes his hands from the handlebars they re-center themselves to a neutral straight ahead position.

Another object of the invention is that the invention mechanically limits the range of motion of the handlebar so as not to over-steer which could potentially damage the device. The invention is also robust enough to compensate for the extreme amount of torque applied by the user during an exciting game sequence.

Still another object of the invention permits a potentiometer to be used in conjunction with an interactive computer or television video game which allows

Another object of the invention is the versatility of the invention as it may be used not only with stationary exercising bicycle but also elliptical trainers and steppers etc.

These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the subsequent detailed description of the preferred embodiment and the appended claims taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 is a partial isometric view of an exercise bicycle with the preferred embodiment of the steering mechanism mounted in place with a video game controller mounted on the steering mechanism utilizing its attachment bracket and the steering mechanism cover is installed.

FIGURE 2 is a partial isometric view of the steering mechanism, less cover, in the preferred embodiment.

FIGURE 3 is side elevation view of the preferred embodiment, less cover.

FIGURE 4 is bottom view of the preferred embodiment, less cover.

FIGURE 5 is front view of the preferred embodiment, less cover.

FIGURE 6 is a partial isometric view of the steering mechanism primary frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 7 is side elevation view of the steering mechanism primary frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 8 is bottom view of the steering mechanism primary frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 9 is front view of the steering mechanism frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 10 is a partial isometric view of the steer frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 11 is side elevation view of the steer frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

5 FIGURE 12 is bottom view of the steer frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

FIGURE 13 is a cross sectional view taken along lines 13-13 of FIGURE 12.

FIGURE 14 is front view of the steer frame, completely removed from the invention for clarity.

10 FIGURE 15 is an exploded view of the steering mechanism, less cover, in the preferred embodiment.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

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The best mode for carrying out the invention is presented in terms of a preferred embodiment. This preferred embodiment is for a steering apparatus that alters steering direction of an exercise bicycle used in conjunction with an interactive computer or television video game simulation. The invention is shown in FIGURES 1 thorough 15 and is comprised of a steering mechanism 20 consisting of a primary frame 22 which includes a steering tube 24 and a steering plate 26. The steering tube 24 is attached to a frame adapter which is contained within the frame head 28 of an exercise bicycle 30, as shown in FIGURE 1.

25 The steering mechanism primary frame 22 includes an L-shaped frame adapter 36 that is welded, or rigidly attached, to the steering tube 24. This adapter 36 fits into the exercise bicycle frame head 28 as depicted in FIGURE 1. While the adapter 36 is illustrated as a square tube, its shape may be round or may have a structural profile as long as it is compatible in size to fit inside the bicycle frame head 28. As illustrated in

FIGURES 6 and 7, the adapter 36 includes a pair of holes 38 that interface with fasteners 40 in the frame head 28 of the exercise bicycle 30 and secure the adapter in place securely. Other methods of attachment are also contemplated and are well known in the art and in common usage.

5 The steering tube 24 is obviously hollow and is permanently attached to the shortest leg of the L-shape adapter 36 as illustrated in FIGURES 6-9. The steering tube duplicates the exercise bicycle frame head 28 and its utility is identical with the only difference is that its location is a little forward and slightly raised.

10 The steering plate 26 is also permanently attached the steering tube 24 just below the adapter 36 by welding, or the like, and is positioned at right angles to the tube 24. The steering plate 26 includes a potentiometer 32 mounted thereupon that is the linear type with an adjusting lever 34 extending downwardly in the middle. The potentiometer 32 is well known and is used in conjunction with the interactive computer or television video game providing a steering direction signal. The potentiometer 32 is attached to the
15 steering plate 26 with conventional machine screws and locknuts 42 and includes electrical leads in the form of a 3 conductor cable 44, or the like. It will be noted at this point that while the use of a linear potentiometer is preferred a round rotational device will function equally well and has been anticipated to be an alternate approach in this invention.

20 The steering plate 26 further includes threaded holes 46 for attaching a mounting bracket 48 for a game controller 50 as illustrated in FIGURE 1. These threaded holes 46 may be tapped, incorporate inserts or conventional nuts welded together to form a pedestal.

25 A radial slot 52 is located in the steering plate 26 near the steering tube 24 and two spring retainers 54 are positioned, one on each outside rear edge. The spring retainers 54 are simply posts that contain a groove 56 that may be studs, rods or carriage bolts as shown. The utility of these above elements will be discussed later in this specification.

A steer frame 58 is rotatably mounted within the steering mechanism primary frame 22 and has at least one spring 60 contiguously suspended between the primary frame 22 and the steer frame 58. While two springs 60 are preferred it is possible to use one torsion spring as an optional approach. When the exercise bicycle rider changes steering direction, by manual planar rotation of the handlebar attached to the steer frame 58, varying linear resistance is created within the potentiometer 32. When the handlebar is unrestrained the steer frame 58 returns to a centered position, duplicating the feel and impression of riding a bicycle.

The steer frame 58 is preferably fabricated as a weldment with a steer member 62 connected on one end to a potentiometer lever bracket 64 at a right angle thereunto. The steer frame 58 is illustrated by itself in FIGURES 10-14 with the steer member 62 a hollow metallic tube and the potentiometer lever bracket 64 a flat metal plate. The steer member 62 of the steer frame 58 is slightly longer than the steering tube 24 and small enough in diameter to slip inside without touching.

The steer frame 58 is held in place with a head set 66 similar to those used on a conventional bicycle, which affixes the steer member 62 rotatably within the primary frame steering tube 24. The head set 66 includes bearings that are pressed between the steering tube 24 and the steer member 62 on the top and bottom. The head set 66 utilizes a cone and crown on both top and bottom as well as spacers on the top. While the preferred embodiment utilizes a plain tubular steer member 62 it may be threaded and use the threaded version of the head set with equal ease.

A handlebar stem 68 is disposed within the steer member 62 of the steer frame 24 and a conventional handlebar 70 is attached to the stem 68 as shown in FIGURE 1. Any type of bicycle stem 68 may be used as the configuration is not essential to the invention only that it must securely attach the handlebars.

The steering plate 26 includes the radial slot 52 therein while the steer plate potentiometer lever bracket 64 has a guide pin 72 extending upward therefrom with the guide pin 72 penetrating the slot 52 for limiting rotational travel between the primary frame 22 and the steer frame 58. Since rotation of the handlebars 70 is essential in some

games to simulate steering and considerable leverage may be utilized to the user it has been found necessary to add a guide pin reinforcing yoke 74 and an optional reinforcing plate 76 for bracing and strengthening the guide pin 72. FIGURES 13 and 14 illustrate the strengthen members and there structural relationship.

5 The primary frame 22, as described above, has the pair of spring retainers 54 which are stationary and the steer frame potentiometer lever bracket 64 has a pair of mating spring holders 78 with each spring 60 fasten between the spring retainer 54 and the spring holder 78 best illustrated in FIGURE 4. The preferred type of spring is an extension spring as it is contiguously suspended between the primary frame 22 and the
10 steer frame 58 and increases resistance the further it is stretched while the opposed spring relaxes its force opposition. The springs 60 are biased in the center where each is stretched an equal amount. While two springs are shown and described the use of a torsion spring is also acceptable and could be a viable alternate as previously discussed.

15 The steer frame potentiometer lever bracket 64 contains a potentiometer lever slot 80 that is in alignment with the potentiometer adjusting lever 34. A potentiometer arm bushing 82 is slideably disposed within the potentiometer lever slot 80 interfacing with the potentiometer linear adjustment lever 34 permitting the potentiometer 32 to be adjusted throughout the axial travel of the potentiometer lever bracket 64 relative to the
20 linear travel of the potentiometer lever 34.

 A cover 84 encloses the bottom portion of the steering plate 26 including the steer frame 58 and springs 60. The cover 84 protects the exposed components from becoming a safety hazard.

 If desired a lockout feature may be added to the invention which prohibits all
25 handlebar steering motion. The steer member 62 may include a threaded hole and the steering tube 24 a nut welded on top of a clearance hole with a threaded knob inserted into the nut. When lockout is desired the threaded knob is screwed into and interfaces with the threaded hole in the steer member 62. Alternatively, this lockout feature may be accomplished by the use of a spring loaded system, passing a pin through both the

steering tube 24 and the steer member 62 or any other equivalent method well known in the art.

While the invention has been described in complete detail and pictorially shown in the accompanying drawings, it is not to be limited to such details, since many changes
5 and modifications may be made to the invention without departing from the spirit and scope thereof. Hence, it is described to cover any and all modifications and forms which may come within the language and scope of the appended claims.